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STATE OF MONTANA

DIVISION OF FORENSIC SCIENCE

DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

275 West Front Street, Missoula, MT 59802 (406) 728-4970

Ronald L. Rivers, M.D.
State Medical Examiner

Arnold B. Melnikoff
Laboratory Bureau Chief

Dawn M. Kingas
Administrative Assistant

JULY 1982

DEATH INVESTIGATION SEMINARS

In cooperation with the Montana Law Enforcement Academy and the respective counties, there will be two day seminars in the following areas. Please contact the MLEA for furthur information.

JULY 8-9	GLENDIVE
JULY 12-13	SCOBEY
JULY 22-23	WHITEFISH

Some out of state courses open to coroners, law enforcement and others interested in death investigation. Contact this department for furthur information.

JULY 6-9	GULFPORT, MISSISSIPPI (IDENTIFICATION OF HUMAN REMAINS)
AUGUST 1-6	ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO (DEATH SCENE INVESTIGATION)
OCTOBER 4-8	ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI (CORONERS TRAINING COURSE)
NOVEMBER 9-13	NEWPORT BEACH, CALIFORNIA (NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MEDICAL EXAMINERS)

CONGRATULATIONS

Our secretary, Melodee Shay, gave birth to a 7# 8oz. baby girl, Stephanie, on June 3, 1982.

IN-HOUSE TRAINING

Firearms Examiner, Bill Newhouse, attended the American Association of Firearms and Toolmarks Examiners from May 9-15. He brought back some valuable information on new types of ammunition and problems encountered in firearms examination.

Julie Long, Forensic Serologist, and Janis Fulton, Forensic Toxicologist, will attend courses in Forensic Science at the FBI Academy in Quantico, VA. this July. All costs are paid by the FBI and selections are made from a two year waiting list.

STATE DOCUMENTS COLLECTION

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ON CALL SCHEDULE - MONTANA STATE MEDICAL EXAMINER

JULY 1982

275 W. Front Street
Missoula, Montana 59802

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2	3 RON RIVERS
4 RON RIVERS	5	6	7	8	9	10 JOHN PFAFF
11 JOHN PFAFF	12	13	14	15	16	17 RON RIVERS
18 RON RIVERS	19	20	21	22	23	24 JOHN PFAFF
25 JOHN PFAFF	26	27	28	29	30	31 RON RIVERS

Telephone Numbers: State Office - 728-4970
WATS Line - 243-5796

Home Phone: Dr. Ron Rivers- 728-2033 (Home)
(week nights call unless otherwise indicated)

Dr. John Pfaff - Great Falls
Hospital - 727-3333
Home - 727-3905

Dr. Ken Mueller- Billings
Hospital - 657-7000
Home - 248-3024

JULY 1982
AUTOMOBILE FATALITIES
R. L. Rivers, M.D.

ANSWERS

1. At a high velocity, impact impressions of objects within the automobile are not only left on the victims but also on objects they are wearing. The accelerator or brake pedals can leave marks on the soles of the shoes of the driver.

   Be sure to collect the pedals for comparison. The impression can tell us if the foot was on the gas or the brake. This can be important in substantiating a suicide. A high speed straight on impact into a bridge abutment without skid marks and an accelerator imprint on the shoe could be suicide.

   In accidents with ejections of two or more victims the driver's estate may be sued for compensation by the survivors of the other victims. To prevent an innocent family from being accused one must be certain in naming the driver.

   At autopsy there can be typical steering wheel injuries, glass injuries, knob and handle injuries that distinguish drivers from passengers.

2. Anytime there is question as to the manner of death (accident versus homicide, suicide, or natural) an autopsy is indicated. If two or more people are involved and there is an question as to who is the driver, order an autopsy. Unobserved single car rollovers should also be examined to accurately determine why the driver left the road. Many are drunk but what if the alcohol comes back negative after the body is buried?

   Multiple blunt injuries have easly disguised bullet wounds and even shotgun wounds. There are numerous instances of homicides initially reported as traffic fatalities. I personally have had three cases of unsuspected gunshot wounds discovered by xray.

3. Eye fluid or vitreous humor can corroborate a blood alcohol. This is very important where insurance benefits are not given to survivors of victims allegedly under the influence.

   Vitreous humor is the best fluid to determine sugar levels in diabetics who may have lapsed into a coma. It is also the best fluid for digitalis determinations in victims with heart disease.

   Blood should be removed from the leg or neck. A chest or heart stick can easily be contaminated by esophogeal or stomach contents, especially in motor vehicle accidents where there may be chest and abdominal injuries.

JULY 1982
AUTOMOBILE FATALITIES
R. L. Rivers, M.D.

"Here they are, Jack. They must have been going a hundred miles an hour around that curve!" A male and female victim lay fairly close together fifty feet from the automobile wreckage.

"When they hit that first post it must have tossed them both out. They sure weren't wearing their seat belts."

As the officer removed some bottles and cans from the vehicle for evidence he noticed a revolver on the floorboard. Three chambers contained empty shells. "I wonder if they were shooting up our highway signs" he remarked to himself.

Soon the coroner arrived and advised the officers that autopsies would be performed. "Be sure to wrap the bodies in sheets and collect the shoes that were knocked off their feet" the coroner said.

"They sure have a lot of head injuries but I didn't see any bullet holes. Do you think the coroner suspects one plugged the other?" "I don't know Jack, but why are the shoes so doggone important? They are clear down in the coulee."

QUESTIONS TO BE CONSIDERED:

1) Why are the shoes considered important?

2) When should an autopsy be ordered in a MVA fatality?

3) What body fluids should be examined irregardless of whether or not an autopsy is ordered?

ANSWERS - page 2

Carbon monoxide leaks have caused many vehicular deaths. Known epileptics should be tested for dilantoin and phenobarbital. Their absence in the bloodstream can explain a convulsion usually prevented by taking this medicine.

Urine can contain many drugs that are easier detected than in the blood.

(NOTE: We are still getting many motor vehicle fatalities without an eye fluid sample. This is a derelict investigation. If you don't know how to take it, we will send you instructions)